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Cuts Urged In Covert Operations

White House Review Follows Iran Affair

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SANTA BARBARA, Calif., April 18—An internal White House review of secret intelligence operations has concluded that nearly a third of the covert missions authorized by President Reagan should be terminated, informed administration sources said today.

The review, ordered following the Iran-contra affair, focused on secret intelligence "findings" such as the one that Reagan signed to allow sale of arms to Iran. The Tower commission criticized the White House for failing to monitor the covert operation properly and failing to notify Congress, and Reagan later ordered a review of all other active findings.

Sources said a decision to cancel nearly a third of them could indicate a significant scaling back from the emphasis on covert operations as a foreign policy tool under former Central Intelligence Agency director William J. Casey. The sources said the review targeted covert operations, as distinct from secret intelligence-gathering efforts.

The sources said national security adviser Frank C. Carlucci is more reluctant to use covert operations because of the potential for political backlash, and his views are shared by acting CIA director Robert M. Gates, who has been more closely associated with the intelligence collection and analysis functions of the agency.

Reagan is expected to receive results of the review shortly, the sources said. The review was conducted by a special group under deputy national security adviser Colin L. Powell and included representatives from other agencies as well as the White House.

Although the precise nature of the operations targeted for termination could not be learned, one informed source said many are counterterrorism operations in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Some were apparently an outgrowth of efforts to free Americans held hostage in Lebanon, the sources said.

The review has found that some operations were outdated and that others had run astray, the sources added. In addition, the review showed that some "findings" were unnecessarily kept active as an umbrella for future operations although no current missions were under way, the sources said.

Some of the covert action findings are to be studied longer, officials said. The White House has also decided to keep Powell's review group for periodic checking of all covert operations.

The president's covert action findings will "come back up on the scope again on a regular basis," one official said.

Such a regular review was urged by members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence during confirmation hearings for FBI Director William H. Webster to head the CIA, and Webster agreed to do so. Webster drew a parallel with a Federal Bureau of Investigation program to review the use of informers.

In the Iran affair, the Tower commission found that White House officials drew up a covert action finding only after they had started the arms sales to Iran. The report said the finding was not shown to key policy-makers and that it was wrongly kept from Congress as well.

The Tower commission said it "found no evidence that an evaluation was ever done during the life of the operation to determine whether it continued to comply with the terms" of the Jan. 17, 1986, finding Reagan had signed approving it.

Reagan, vacationing at his ranch near here, said in his weekly radio address today that Secretary of State George P. Shultz had "made constructive progress" on arms control and other issues during his visit this week to Moscow.

Shultz "made clear," Reagan said, "that Americans take human rights seriously, as is evident during this week of religious import. We cannot and will not close our eyes to the suppression of religious freedom, be the victim a Christian, a Jew or other religious faith."

Reagan also reviewed the status of the arms-control talks and said the superpowers "have an opportunity to take tangible, step-by-step progress toward a more peaceful world. This is in both our interests."